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TEACHER-TRAINING IN THE
DEVELOPMENT OF FOREIGN-LANGUAGE TEACHING

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TEACHER-TRAINING IN THE
DEVELOPMENT OF FOREIGN-LANGUAGE TEACHING

AIMS OF PAPER

The main aims of this paper are:

1. To give an exposé of the nature, quantity and quality of teacher preparation and teacher-training in Trinidad and Tobago with particular concern for teacher-training and teacher preparation in and for the teaching of foreign languages.
2. To draw attention to current needs and issues in the area of teacher education, teacher preparation and teacher-training in general.
3. To consider what specific and specialized education and training for teaching foreign languages exists.
4. To suggest possible steps and strategies that might be undertaken to educate, train, re-train and prepare persons to teach foreign languages in Trinidad and Tobago.

TEACHER-TRAINING IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

The general professional training of the majority of teachers in Trinidad and Tobago is organized by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Community Development, and conducted at six (6) Teachers' Colleges over a two-year period.

Together they turn out annually some six hundred and sixty (660) teachers prepared for teaching mainly at the primary level.

Entry requirements

To enter the Teaching Service a person is required:

- i. to have passes in five (5) subjects at Ordinary Level. One (1) of these must be a pass in English Language. A pass in a foreign language is not a pre-requisite;
- ii. he/she must register as a Teacher prospective;

- iii. he/she presents himself/herself for an interview by a panel of officers of the Head Office of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Community Development; and
- iv. he/she is then appointed on probation to a public school and assigned to a class by the Principal or Vice-Principal.

It follows then that entry into the Teaching Service takes place without professional orientation or training.

Admission to a Teachers' College

The teacher waits his turn to be sent to a Teachers' College for a two-year course of training. This usually takes place after he has been teaching for three (3) or more years.

He is free to accept the opportunity extended to him for entry into college or postpone it.

He may apply to go to a different college from the one to which he was originally assigned.

Initial Teacher-Training at a Teachers' College is:

- i. In-service training;
- ii. Full-time training and education, divorced from the responsibilities of being in charge of a class;
- iii. Student-teachers receive their full salaries during their stay at college.

The Curriculum of the Teachers' Colleges

The following courses are compulsory for all student-teachers:

- | | | |
|--------------|---|--|
| A. Education | - | 1. Psychology and Sociology of Education
2. Philosophy and Practice of Education
3. Practical Teaching. |
| B. | | *4. Language Study
5. Literary Studies
*6. Social Studies
7. Mathematics
8. General Science |
| C. | | *9. An Elective Subject chosen from the number permitted by the syllabus and offered by the College - Spanish and French included. |

None of the Teachers' Colleges offer French. French was offered by three (3) colleges up to 1970.

Reasons for the decline of French and Spanish at Teachers' Colleges

1. Unavailability of qualified, confident and competent teacher educators for teaching foreign languages. (Aspiring students are often advised to find another Elective).
2. Fewer students are electing subjects from the humanities. Instead the trend is to elect one of the practical arts and crafts, e.g. Home Economics, Handicraft, Agriculture.
3. Very limited opportunities to teach Spanish with college supervision since teaching practice is done mainly in primary schools where Spanish is not on the programme of work.
4. On graduation, even those students who have distinguished themselves in Spanish have little hope of being absorbed into the Junior Secondary School to teach Spanish nor to receive further training in teaching Spanish.
5. Negative attitudes and blocks in Spanish set in at the Secondary School due in part to poor teaching and little or no motivation.
6. Streaming at some secondary schools relegates the weaker pupils to pursuing Spanish, the brighter ones to French. Streaming may make it impossible for a student to pursue any foreign language at all.
7. There is a wider choice of subjects open to students at G.C.E. 'O' Level.
8. Change in philosophy behind the Elective subjects at Teachers' Colleges.

Before 1970, the Elective Subject was conceived as an academic study intended for the personal development of the individual student, as distinct from his professional development.

At present, greater emphasis is placed on methods of learning and teaching the Elective Subjects.

THE EXTENT OF FOREIGN-LANGUAGE TEACHING IN
THE EDUCATION SYSTEM OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Generally speaking, foreign language teaching begins at the post-primary level of education.

In the 1960's, Spanish was imposed on or introduced into the post-primary classes (Standards 6 and 7) of the then all-age schools with little success.

The teachers were neither qualified nor prepared for the task, and were therefore unable to cope, or to motivate the large number of pupils forming these classes, beyond a very limited period.

The text provided suggested the methods envisaged. General overcrowding and attempts to get pupils through the Primary School-leaving Certificate in Mathematics, English Language and a General Paper (No paper in Spanish) made the attempt at Spanish-teaching abortive.

This abortive attempt at teaching Spanish at the post-primary classes may not be without some undentable negative conditionality of attitudes to Spanish-teaching.

Private Fee-Paying Preparatory Schools

Spanish and French have been taught at some preparatory schools, (Note: the designation is "preparatory" not primary), e.g. the University Staff School. Children in attendance come from homes with progressive professionals and intellectuals. Some of them began schooling overseas, most move in a stimulating social milieu in which foreign languages and cultures have a real existence. Many of these children enter secondary schools in Trinidad. Many do not. They leave for schools overseas.

Teachers of Foreign Languages in Preparatory Schools

Those secured to teach the language are frequently native speakers or persons who have lived for sometime in a country where the language is spoken. Many are voluntary helpers, parent-teacher members; some are experienced teachers who have opted out of the public system; have resigned from the teaching service but have retained a love for teaching.

They are often mature persons with the courage of their convictions, who have a clear notion of what they wish to do as their life's work. For them teaching is either a hobby, a past-time, a pleasure, a diversion. Individual work is possible and practical.

As such their teaching stimulates learning, and the response received is often much better in quality than obtained in the public schools with their greater numbers of learners.

Foreign-Language Teaching at the Traditional Five-Year Secondary Schools

By tradition, by design, and by virtue of the deployment of their staff, the older secondary schools are free to offer a number of foreign languages, e.g. French, Spanish, Latin.

Many offer pupils two (2) modern languages, others reserve French for the more gifted and Spanish for those considered less able.

Early streaming sometimes makes it impossible for some students in the Sciences stream to pursue a foreign language.

Teachers are seldom native speakers. Some are University graduates. Some may be former students who have passed the subject at 'A' level.

Teaching methods in these schools are traditional, mainly indirect and exam oriented. Language clubs are encouraged.

A few schools have a language laboratory.

Foreign-Language Teaching in Private Secondary Schools

Some of these schools offer both French and Spanish depending on the staff available. Teaching methods vary from ultra-progressive in a few schools, especially those in which English may have to be taught to some pupils as a foreign language, to the nondescript, depending again on the quality and the experience of the staff. Salaries and conditions of work for staff are often more exacting than in the larger secondary schools that are government-maintained or assisted. The school term may be longer than that of the public school.

"Commercial Schools" or Secretarial Colleges are mainly private establishments. Some of them cater for Spanish-speaking students, mainly from Venezuela, who have done English at Secondary Schools, mainly by traditional, indirect methods.

These schools offer English to the Spanish-speaking students as a foreign language. Some offer Spanish to their English-speaking students too.

Tutors are not professionally trained teachers.

Conversational and commercial Spanish is taught. Success achieved is often due to strong motivation on the part of the student, small classes, person to person relationship and the warmth and personal enthusiasm of the individual tutors.

Foreign-Language Teaching in the Junior Secondary School

Spanish alone is offered to all students in the Junior Secondary Schools, three (3) times per week over a three (3) year period.

Junior Secondary School teachers of Spanish may be categorized accordingly:

- (a) Teachers with initial general teacher-training, with Elective Spanish and/or 'A' Level Spanish plus additional part-time training in Spanish prior to appointment to the Junior Secondary School. One aspect of their training in Spanish was the teaching of Spanish - theory and practice - with practice-teaching done under supervision. Direct methods were advocated.
- (b) University graduates with no prior professional training nor experience in teaching/class and with no training in teaching Spanish.
- (c) Younger persons with Advanced Level Passes in Spanish, but with no professional training, no teaching experience prior to appointment to the Junior Secondary School. These are called Assistant Teacher III.
- (d) University graduates with prior professional training and experience teaching at Primary level. At the J.S.S., in addition to teaching Spanish, they may have the additional responsibility of being Vice-Principal.

Due to the various levels of preparedness, teachers of Spanish vary considerably in their teaching competence. Differences in attitudes to teaching are to be expected too.

Continuity and consistency of approaches to teaching Spanish is not guaranteed where there is such a variety of levels. Concern for the results of the 14-plus examination helps to dull the edge of the teaching of Spanish.

In the first term, the children are quite eager to learn Spanish. It constitutes a novelty for many of them at this stage. However, this early enthusiasm fades because of the exigencies of the two-shift system, teacher absenteeism aggravating shortages of staff, fairly large classes of 40 students each, absence of any furtive materials for teaching and learning unavailability of guidance from the curriculum supervisors, absence of a language room, the difficulty of forming language clubs due to the shift system - the rigid timetabling.

In short, the teaching of Spanish at the Junior Secondary School is "perhaps the biggest single problem concerning the teaching of Spanish."

The approach to teaching is mainly archaic. Without adequate teaching aids, the younger teachers soon tire of oral work, especially as this is the only subject that they teach.

Because of the rigid timetabling and the single subject specialization in all areas, integrating Spanish with other curricula areas, e.g. Social Studies, English, Music, is not an easy matter.'

Public expectation of the performance of the Junior Secondary School is low. By expecting little from these schools, the public, including parents help to de-motivate the pupils further.

The majority of children leaving the Junior Secondary Schools are strangers to French and end up indifferent to or disliking Spanish.

Spanish at the Senior Comprehensive School

Spanish is offered to all students at the senior comprehensive school. French is offered only to those pursuing academic studies in the Humanities.

The Senior Comprehensive Schools receive students mainly from the Junior Secondary Schools to pursue courses for a minimum of two (2) more years or a maximum of four (4) more years.

The wide range of subjects offered their disenchantment with Spanish at the Junior Secondary level, and the fact that Spanish is compulsory, serves to make pupils rate Spanish very poorly. It is said that many are refusing to turn up for Spanish classes at all, especially if those classes are in the afternoon. The most "Hostile" students are those in the specialized craft courses, as far as taking Spanish goes.

Teachers of Spanish in the Senior Comprehensive Schools

These teachers are all University Graduates in Spanish. Many have had previous experience teaching Spanish, many have not. Similarly, some have had general professional training as class teachers, some have not.

Special training in teaching Spanish is not widespread. The approach to teaching Spanish is generally traditional, with considerable anxiety being experienced over the forthcoming examinations, at the present time.

Equipment and aids

There is provision for equipping these schools with language laboratories. Hopefully, these will help to determine teaching methods used.

French and the Senior Comprehensive School

For students taking the academic course, French is offered as an Elective. It is an alternative to English Literature.

In as much as no French is offered at the Junior Secondary Schools which feed the Senior Comprehensive Schools, students choosing French must begin French at this school, and study it for four years. Few students are so inclined.

Discussions on structures presented are conducted in Spanish. Students are to devote five hours per week to this course.

There is no end of course-examination as such, in the first year. Instead assessment is cumulative and based on tests given at the end of each lesson or unit.

Other teaching strategies include:

- Membership in the Spanish Club
- Obligation to spend at least two months in a Spanish-speaking country
- Students' exchange between the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, and the University of Merida, Venezuela.

One notable feature is that there is no course dealing specifically with methods and strategies of teaching foreign languages. This is not reflected in the text or recommended books either. And yet a large percentage of the graduates seek and find employment in the teaching service.

The School of Education

The School of Education is responsible for an In-Service diploma programme. Students are in the main secondary school teachers who graduated from University some five years prior to entry on the course, at the least.

There is no end of course examination. Issues and problems in education are studied by means of discussions, and guided reading and study; essay and papers are presented on problems surfaced.

A thesis or extended essay on a topic of choice is presented at the end of the course.

The approach may be termed - problem oriented, holistic and practical.

Practical teaching is supervised by staff tutors and conducted in the worked class setting.

On an average, about 20 persons engaged in modern language teaching, are selected for the in-service diploma.

The programme has not won the approval of the Trinidad and Tobago public, mainly because it is a non-examination programme. However, those who take the course complain of the strain of course work with which they must cope and at the same time service their own classes.

Professional awareness and improvement is promoted by shared discussions of problems in teaching in general - methodology arises out of and is related to the total education experience. Students are counselled, and they try to implement techniques in teaching and re-teaching their lessons.

FOREIGN-LANGUAGE TEACHING AT TEACHERS' COLLEGES

Many teacher-educators hold a recent first degree in addition to a primary school teachers' certificate and/or a diploma in Education or a Bachelor in Education. "A disturbing number hold a first degree with a minimum of years of proven competence as a classroom teacher." Others have teaching experience from work in various types of schools in the system.

Some of the language tutors - i.e. of English and of foreign languages have theoretical and practical training in the teaching of language.

All student trainees receive instruction and get some practice in second language teaching by the structural approach.

Those electing Spanish may or may not get further instruction on methodology depending on who is the tutor. A pre-requisite is an O-Level Pass in Spanish.

As stated earlier, they get few opportunities to practice teaching Spanish in a school setting.

In the first year, $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours per week is allocated to Spanish, and in the second year, about 5 hours per week.

Much time is spent on oral work - reading, conversation and dictation. Small-group work is possible; student directed dictation is rotated; conversation deals with current events, and professional themes. Reasons for choosing Spanish and the relevance of Spanish studies in Trinidad and Tobago is established by discussion, personal testimony, and a research paper on some aspect of life in Trinidad which reflects Spanish influence.

Comparisons and contrasts with the course in Language Studies (English Language) are often pursued in discussion and in writing.

Methods of teaching the student-teachers include some direct and some indirect approaches, occasionally a visiting native speaker is engaged.

Some attempt is made to relate the course to the Social Studies programme.

Students are introduced to some aspects of Spanish-American Culture e.g. literature, music, song and dance. At the end of the course, all students are more favourably disposed to Spanish civilization.

OTHER FOREIGN LANGUAGES USED IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Hindi

1. Hindi dialect/s are spoken by rural East Indians, and used as a medium of communication between friends and relatives in a familiar setting.
It is sometimes used as a barrier to communication in the presence of younger persons, persons of the opposite sex, and strangers to the local community.
Most Hindi speakers understand English and can speak some form of English.
2. Hindi is widely used over the local radio stations in "cultural and religious programmes".
3. Hindi is one of the languages of the Hindu religion. As such it is used in primary and secondary schools run by Hindi denominational boards at morning and afternoon assembly and during religious instruction periods.
Some schools spend some time regularly teaching elements of Hindi by traditional methods.
4. Hindi as a language of the Hindu religion is used in religious rituals connected with birth, marriage and death, on social occasions like wedding celebrations and the celebrations of festivals like Diwali, Phagwah, etc.
5. Hindi is heard via records of Indian songs and via the thriving industry in Indian Films.

6. Individual students, some adults, some of secondary school age, write Hindi exams at G.C.E. O-Level and A-Level. Local Hindu groups sponsor competitions and contests in Indian culture including essay writing in English or Indian themes, oral Hindi, written Hindi, singing and composition of bhajans, etc. Children of school age, children at school and young people are the main participants. There are strong pockets of insistence that Hindi should be an alternative to Spanish or should be an elective at many more secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. The teachers and the promoters of Hindi are in the main pundits, some school teachers are involved as teachers and as organizers. Strong integrative motivation is one factor making for successful learning of Hindi despite traditional methods. Modern methods and instruction in modern methods, books and courses are available in small quantities through the Indian High Commission in Port of Spain. At the University Level, there is a vibrant militant Hindu society. Similar societies exist at some Teachers' Colleges.

Arabic

Arabic is another language used in Trinidad and Tobago sufficiently to warrant consideration.

1. Arabic is the sacred language of the Holy Koran and in that sense of the worshipping Muslim community. Conversions to Islam are proceeding apace.
2. The Islamic Missionary zeal is promoted by the Islamic Missionaries Guild through radio broadcasts. Arabic is used in family prayers and other public rituals connected with death, birth, etc. Like Hindi, it is used at assemblies in schools run by Muslim denominations. Current interest in Afro-Asian studies have given to Arabic another lease on life. As for Hindi, so far, Arabic promoters are not necessarily trained teachers, though many teachers are involved in the promotion. Methods are traditional. The objective is to be able to read and recite the Koran in Arabic. Of lesser magnitude is the use of Arabic by members of the Syrian-Lebanese community in familiar circles and in their business places as a barrier to communication and to understanding by strangers.

HOW IMPORTANT IS TEACHER PREPARATION

In Trinidad and Tobago, as in other parts of the Caribbean, it is generally agreed that teachers are crucial to any change of national importance. Increasingly too, it is realized that teachers alone are not responsible for changes in our societies.

In the foreword to the New Primary School Syllabus, Gomes submits:-

"In the final analysis, one must face the inescapable fact that the major instrument of change is the teacher, who must understand not only what he is doing, but why he is doing it as well." 5/

According to Beddoe:-

"the most critical link in the system of education is the system of recruiting and retaining high quality teacher educators The harvest that we reap through our schools will be enriched or impoverished to the extent that we ensure or do not ensure quality educators." 6/

"In order to improve the standard of education in Trinidad and Tobago, teacher-training and the teaching profession as a whole should be improved and ways be found of attracting into it people dedicated to seeking the welfare of students", was one of the recommendations of the "Valdez Report". 7/

What is true for education in general holds good for the teaching of foreign languages as well.

It must be noted that with universal primary education, and the thrust towards universal secondary education, more and more of their lives in schoolrooms, presided over by school-teachers.

Teachers as a body form the largest single group of professional workers in Trinidad and Tobago.

"Education is the largest single industry in our society." 8/

Teacher-preparation, quantitatively and qualitatively is therefore of crucial and urgent importance in national development, and for the development and improvement of foreign language learning.

Teacher-Training for the Development and Improvement
of Foreign-Language Teaching

For the effective development of Foreign-Language teaching in Trinidad and Tobago, the training and re-training of teachers of foreign languages must take into account much more than merely making the foreign-language teacher efficient in teaching of a foreign language.

In my view, teacher training for effective foreign-language teaching in our education system must address itself to generating and mobilizing support from and through the training of all teachers in and for the primary level of education.

Every teacher in our primary schools is a teacher of language. Our teacher training programmes therefore must strive to make all our teachers at primary level more effective teachers of language and more efficient users of language. This will help to lay a better foundation for foreign-language learning and teaching throughout the education system.

Teacher training for the development of effective foreign-language teaching must be accompanied by teacher education that seeks to make all teachers conscious of philosophies of development - human and material. Without this philosophical under-girding, and accompaniment, foreign language programmes will continue to meet with unhealthy resistance both from other subject teachers as well as from students. There are many persons who genuinely believe that learning a foreign language is a waste of time; is an economic waste; is detrimental to our economic development, and is inferior to the pursuit of science and technology, especially at this time of feverish economic activity. Many see it as a hallmark of colonial and neo-colonial metropolitan-oriented citizens.

Teacher Training for effective foreign-language teaching must be facilitated and support by and through a meaningful social studies programme for all teachers in training and through an affective and effective programme in the creative arts.